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ABSTRACT

The use of case frames of verbs as a control for the teaching of vocabulary items has a number of distinct advantages over other controls. The case frame associated with a particular vocabulary item, or with a particular semantic class, would be the same in the native and the target language (English). This would have the advantage of allowing the student to see how his language is the same as the target language. It would also enable the materials to be situationally as well as structurally controlled, and allow the student to use conceptual (as well as syntactic) clues in learning new vocabulary items. (Author)

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The Use of Case Grammar in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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In 1968, Charles Fillmore published an important article entitled "The Case for Case," (Bach and Harms' Universals in Linguistic Theory). Fillmore had written this article in 1966, and even prior to publication it had caused a stir among linguists. Fillmore proposed that the universal base component in linguistics consists of semantic cases, rather than semantic features, or phonological units, or syntactic structures, all of which had been previously proposed.

According to Fillmore, the verbs of any particular language select the particular semantic cases that they are compatible with. This situation has often been compared to a dramatic play, in which there is the plot, the setting, and the characters. Thus, if a sentence is considered to be a miniature one-act play, the plot is represented by the predication (i.e., the verb or adjective). The setting would be represented by various adverbs indicating such things as the Time, the Place, the Manner, or the Extent of the action. And just as a play might have a hero, and a villain, and a person who is oppressed by the villain or saved by the hero, our sentence might have an Agent (i.e., the hero or villain), and an Experiencer (i.e., the victim or beneficiary). Thus, in the sentence, "Jack Armstrong used his all-American muscles to prevent Boris Badinoff from tying Mary Trueheart to the railroad tracks," Jack Armstrong is an Agent; and his all-American muscles is an Instrument; and Boris Badinoff is at the same time an Experiencer of the verb prevent, and an Agent of the verb tying. Mary Trueheart is just an Experiencer, because she never acts, but is

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always acted upon. And of course the railroad tracks in our miniature drama is the Place of the setting.

To follow our analogy further, just as the roles in a play are determined by the plot, the deep cases in a sentence are determined by the predication. Because of this, there is an extremely high correlation between the case frames of verbs, and the semantic categories to which they belong. Typically, verbs of motion, such as creep, dart, fly, go, and slide are compatible with an Agent, Source, Path, and Goal, and if these verbs are transitive, like move, ship, bus, truck, and cart, there is an Object as well. Thus, the sentence "John flew from New York to Chicago via Philadelphia," has the same case frame as "John bussed the football players from Ann Arbor to Detroit via Ypsilanti," except that the first sentence is intransitive and the second is transitive. All verbs of motion therefore have basically the same case frame.

The notions of Source and Goal are very broad notions. As we have seen, such notions are relevant with verbs of motion to indicate the geographical place where the movement started from, and the geographical place where the item ended up, respectively. But the notions of Source and Goal have broader application than merely with verbs of movement. For example, with verbs of transfer, such as borrow, inherit, intercept, receive, seize, and steal, as in the sentence, "John seized the cake from his sister," it is again possible to talk about the Source--that is, the place that the Object started out--and the Goal--that is, the place that the Object ended up. There are two basic differences, however, between the case frame of verbs of motion and that of verbs of transfer. With verbs of motion, the notion of Path (e.g., via Ypsilanti) is relevant, whereas with verbs of transfer this notion is probably not relevant. And secondly, verbs of transfer are always transitive, while

verbs of motion can be either transitive or intransitive.[1] Therefore, while it is possible to have the intransitive motion sentence "John jumped from one side of the ditch to the other," and the transitive motion sentence "John moved the piano from one side of the room to the other," sentences in which something is transferred must (at least implicitly) have an Object, for it is not possible to say "John stole," without meaning "John stole something."

Verbs of exchange, such as buy, pay, rent, sell, spend, and trade are similar to verbs of transfer, except that with verbs of exchange there are two transfers going on rather than one. For example, in the sentence "Mary will sublet the apartment from Matilda," there are actually two Objects, two Sources, and two Goals. One of the Objects is the apartment, which has Matilda as the Source, and Mary as the Goal. The other Object is the money implicit within the sentence, which has Mary as the Source, and Matilda as the Goal. Thus, verbs of exchange can be analyzed as verbs of double transfer, and it is therefore obvious that verbs of transfer and verbs of exchange can be considered to have the same case frames. It might also be possible to use the notions of Source and Goal in talking about verbs of creation or destruction, whereby the Source in reference to a verb of creation would be the miscellaneous pieces of material, and the Goal would be the completed item, and the Source in reference to a verb of destruction would be the complete item, and the Goal would be the miscellaneous pieces of material that resulted from the destruction. Although such a view would be

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[1]It may be best to think of verbs of motion as always requiring an Object in the deep structure, with this Object being optionally, obligatorily, or non-deletable, depending on the particular verb. If this is true, then such a sentence as "I went from Chicago to New York" would be derived from the more basic sentence "I took myself from Chicago to New York." At the present time I am not suggesting which of these positions should be adopted.

revealing, I would prefer to consider verbs of creation and verbs of destruction as extensions of verbs of contact, which I will describe later in the paper. In other words, I am assuming that verbs of creation and destruction, like verbs of contact have Agents, Instruments, and Objects in their case frames rather than Sources and Goals.

There are also certain verbs that select the Locative case. Verbs of Attachment, like bolt, clamp, rivet, screw, staple, tape, and wire, as in "John stapled a calendar to his desk," in fact require two Locatives, since one item is attached to another, by means of the Instrument, which is incorporated into the verb, i.e. a staple, a clamp, a rivet, etc. Sometimes, the Locative Case itself is incorporated into the verb, so that when we use such verbs as bottle, box, crate, package, etc., as in "John crated the tomatoes," we actually mean that he put something (the tomatoes), into a place (the crate). A set of verbs very closely related to the one I have just been discussing represents incorporation of the Material Case. Such verbs as asphalt, butter, gravel, and salt, as in "John asphalted his driveway," are the result of incorporation of the Material Case into the verb. If we asphalt a particular place, we are, in fact, putting the material, asphalt, in that place.

There are certain verbs which considerably limit the number of cases in their case frames. Thus, such verbs as crumble, decompose, disintegrate, and flutter, as in "The statue crumbled," and such adjectives as careful, foolish, impolite, obnoxious, and tactful, as in "John is obnoxious," have only the Agent in their case frames; and such weather adjectives as cloudy, hot, miserable, snowing, and windy, as in "It's windy," have only the Objective Case (i.e. the weather) usually implied in such a way that the only deep cases that normally emerge on the surface structure with verbs of this class are cases in the Adverbial (i.e. Modal) component, such as Locative, Temporal, and Extent, as in "Chicago is windy," "The first part of March

is usually windy," and "It is extremely windy," respectively. In fact, descriptive adjectives in general can be thought of as one-place predicates allowing only the Objective Case. Examples would include fat, impotent, intelligent, popular, and red, as in "The bubblegum is red." And there are also verbs of sound that are one-place predicates, allowing only the Instrumental Case, such as bang, buzz, click, crash, and thud, as in "That thimgamajig buzzes." I would like to consider such verbs as hum, roar, whine, and whistle, as in "John was humming," as belonging to this same class. Although it might be argued that the creator of the latter noises is human, and therefore an Agent, I would prefer to think of such noises as being made by the vocal tracts rather than the people. In addition, such sounds are often attributed to things that must be classed as Instruments rather than Agents, as in "The motor was humming," or "The wind whistled through the trees."

The Experiencer Case (which has been called at various times the Dative, and the Benefactive) is also selected by the semantic categories of particular verbs. Verbs of ownership, such as belong, have, need, possess, and want, as in "John has a new car;" verbs of perception, such as believe, comprehend, imagine, remember, and understand, as in "John couldn't remember his name;" verbs of sense, such as feel, hear, perceive, and taste, as in "John felt the blade;" and verbs of psychological events, such as adore, desire, enjoy, and thrill, as in "Mary enjoys adventure;" all have two-place predicates, with Objects and Experiencers in their case frames. All of these semantic categories have one thing in common; they all represent a passive predication. There is no real physical action involved in any of these predications with Experiencer subjects.

In contrast, consider verbs which have the three-place case frames of Agents, Instruments, and Objects. These verbs do indeed indicate a real physical

action; and in fact, there are probably more verbs that belong to this Agent-Instrument-Object case frame category than to any other single category. If the Object is concrete, the predication usually represents some kind of contact. Such verbs as hit, tag, touch, smack, and strike, as in "The prisoner (A) struck the guard (O) with a shovel (I)," are verbs of contact. If the purpose of the contact is to create something, we have a special subset of contact verbs which represent creation, such as build, design, make, and repair, as in "John (A) repaired the radio (O) with bailing wire (I)." Verbs of creation can be further divided into subsets, as for example verbs relating to cooking, such as bake, boil, fry, and toast, as in "John (A) toasted marshmallows (O) over the campfire (I)." Verbs of destruction represent a more violent type of contact. The destruction may be partial, as with crack, lacerate, peel, or puncture, as in "John (A) punctured the innertube (O) with a nail (I);" or the destruction may be total, as with annihilate, demolish, eradicate, obliterate, or raze, as in "The army (A) demolished the city (O) with mortar fire (I)." And if the thing destroyed is animate rather than inanimate, then the case frame is Agent, Instrument, and Experiencer, rather than Agent, Instrument, and Object. Consider, for example, such verbs as conquer, defeat, vanquish, and wound, as in "John (A) wounded the enemy soldier (E) with a bayonet (I)," for partial animate destruction, and assassinate, exterminate, kill, and murder, as in "John (A) murdered his wife (E) with a screwdriver (I)," for total animate destruction. There are virtually unlimited additional semantic categories representing the Agent-Instrument-Object case frame. Verbs displaying the causative en affix, such as blacken, enslave, frighten, and strengthen, as in "John (A) blackened his face (O) with soot (I)," represent one such category. One important fact about verbs of this A-I-O structure class is that the Instrument is very often incorporated into the verb. Sometimes the incorporation is transparent, as in the verbs knife or fiddle, as in "John (A) knifed his best friend (E)," but at other times, the incorporation is opaque, as in the

verbs see or smell, as in "John smelled the spareribs," where the Instruments incorporated into see and smell are the eye, and the nose respectively. Although the process of verbal incorporation is very important, and although knowledge of this process is important in teaching English as a foreign language, I shall not dwell further on the subject in this paper.

Sometimes, the Object for verbs having an Agent-Instrument-Object case frame is not concrete. Semantic categories representing this possibility would include verbs of allowance, such as authorize, commission, and entitle, as in "John authorized Bill to preside at the meeting;" verbs of help, such as assist, teach, and train, as in "John taught his dog to play dead;" verbs of encouragement, such as admonish, entreat, and persuade, as in "John persuaded Mary to stay with him;" verbs of expectation, such as count on, desire, and expect, as in "John expected the army to retreat;" and verbs of force, such as command, compel, and require, as in "John commanded his troops to withdraw." Actually, the only difference between verbs of allowance, help, encouragement, expectation, and force is one of degree. One additional class of verb that has the A-I-O case frame, with an abstract object would be verbs of communication, such as claim, describe, tell, and shout, as in "John shouted to Bill that they had been spotted." Such verbs are four-place predicates, however, since there is the necessity of an Experiencer being in the case frame (at least implicitly).

At this point, the reader might very well be asking himself "What has all of this got to do with the teaching of English as a foreign language?" I personally believe that the kinds of things I have been considering can have a great deal to do with EFL teaching. Case Grammar seems to me to be a very sound pedagogical tool for teaching English as a foreign language. In the first place, it has a universal base. The cases and the case frames that we have been talking about in English are also present in the native languages of all EFL

students. It would therefore be possible to begin instruction on this common ground, and proceed to the study of how these common cases happen to be signalled in English surface structure. Second, Case Grammar has a semantic, rather than a syntactic base. This enables the materials to be at the same time structured, and situationally oriented. For example, a situation might be suggested which involves various types of transactions. In talking about a department store, for example, one might use such verbs as buy, sell, exchange, take, give, receive, trade, steal, etc. realizing that verbs appropriate to this situation all have basically the same case frame: Agent, Source, Goal, and Object, both in the native and in the target language. In exactly the same way, verbs of creation, destruction, perception, and communication, etc. have exactly the same deep cases in all languages. Case Grammar would make it possible to have a semantically oriented EFL program (or class), which at the same time could be highly structured grammatically. It would allow the students to go from the known (the deep structure, which is the same in all languages), to the unknown (the surface structure of English). It would enable the students to handle concepts and entire semantic areas in place of individual words. And considerable psychological reinforcement would come from the fact that the students could have real-life "hooks" upon which to hang thousands of vocabulary items.